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by

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White Ladies: Defining Myself Through the Language of Clothing

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Abstract

White Ladies: Defining Myself Through the Language of Clothing

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As an artist who studies costume, I am fascinated by the way that people represent their personalities through their clothing choices. Clothing creates a sign system that indicates to outsiders details about self-expression, insecurities, and perspective.

In this project, I studied my own self-expression through clothing by creating an art installation consisting of self-portrait photography. The self-portraits consist of four fictitious characters, which are each representations of four different versions of my potential future self. Each character contains specific characteristics derived from my own personality. The characters are named, “The Artist,” “The Hermitess,” “The Hobbyist,” and “Real Estate Mom.” Each of the characters was created using clothing, accessories, makeup, posture, expression, and physical location.

Through the creation of each of these characters, I analyzed my own personality traits and how they express the way that I represent myself through clothing. Through this process, I learned to find a better voice and understanding for my artistic choices.

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Chapter 1: *Introduction*

I am a Costume Designer by training and trade. The word *costume* is frequently associated with Halloween, Cosplay, scantily clad women in themed outfits, movie monsters, parades, drag queens, and period films. However, in my work, *costume* is about the creation and representation of character. Costume designer and scholar, Deborah Landis, defines the role of a costume designer as, “to support the narrative by creating authentic characters” (8). Meanwhile, Nancy Freidland defines the work of costume designers as “that of dressing actors to look like (and more fully become) their characters” by “sketch(ing) clothing, select(ing) fabrics, (choosing) colors, (negotiating) the needs of actors, and...work(ing) with a director's vision of the overall design of the film” (2010). When designing costumes, I work to create clothed looks for performers to help the audience further understand a story or narrative. My profession is about understanding and interpreting the way that people dress, why they dress as they do, and then translating those ideas into characters.

Simple choices about the way people dress express important details of a person's identity, such as their gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, and age. According to Roland Barthes, clothing, in its primal form, is worn for “protection, modesty, (and) ornamentation” (Language of Fashion 6). Looking deeper into the meaning of dress, we can discover even more vital details about a person's inner self through the way they express themselves in their clothing. Clothing can be used to represent many different elements of an individual's personality, lifestyle, and perspective. It represents an individual's agency, whether passive or active (Evans 231). Clothing symbolizes our past experiences, the way we want others to perceive us, and the way we see ourselves from one day compared to the next.

The subtle importance of clothing has long been a part of my life. As a pre-teen, I tried out for the middle school volleyball team having never played volleyball before. A relative once told me that dressing like I knew what I was doing would give me a better chance of making the team, so my mom took me to a sporting goods store to purchase knee pads and knee-high athletic socks. Although my outfit did not help my poor volleyball skills, it was a lesson I would remember. Even in our personal lives, we can dress to play a part.

As an elementary through high school student, I looked forward to the annual tradition of selecting my “First Day of School Outfit.” My mom would purchase for me a new pair of shoes and an outfit each fall. Each year, it was a completely different aesthetic, depending on who I seemed to think I would be in a particular school year. In fifth grade, I aimed for the “spunky athlete” look in a “Limited Too” t-shirt featuring a glitter-coated, rainbow smiley face, and a pair of tear-away, rip-stop joggers. In sixth grade, I expressed my desperate desire to be “cool” with a cheerleader-like outfit, consisting of a navy skort, patriotic t-shirt, and platform Skechers sneakers. Through these choices, I learned that clothing could be used as a form of self-expression, even if I was not sure yet of what kind of self I wanted to express (Language of Fashion 24).

As a college student, I continued this tradition on a semesterly basis, encouraging my roommates to join in the seasonal ritual of creating their own “First Day of School Outfit.” It was as though I believed our clothing choices at the beginning of each semester gave us the power to be whomever we wanted to be for the next five months. I started college dressed as a preppy, sorority girl, wearing khaki shorts, Sperry’s, a Ralph Lauren button down, and a short bob haircut, following a dress code that I believed was required of me to fit in within college life. I ended college dressed in a way that fit better with my own taste and I grew my hair long again,

representing my new found independence. As a young adult, I learned to use clothing to express myself in an even more plotted way by wearing white on first dates with the intention of subtly expressing to my dates that I was a “good girl.” “Look at how virginal and angelic I am,” in my white, crochet lace, clavicle bearing, peasant blouse.

According to Allison Guy and Maura Banim, women dress for the person that they “want to be,” “fear” they “could be,” and the woman they are “most of the time” (Personal Collections 313). Young career hopefuls are told: “Dress for the job you want, not for the job you have,” and I believe this idea can extend into all aspects of life. We can dress not only for the job we want but for the person we want to be. I firmly agree with Cintra Wilson, style writer of the New York Times, who noted that if we change our clothing we can change our circumstances (7).

In my professional work, I research a character’s backstory and lifestyle, analyzing each and every detail about what makes up their clothing choices. I spend significant amounts of time and energy deciding specific details, such as what style of pocket watch a character would carry or how distressed his garments would be from years of wear. While I have spent many a morning selecting the “perfect outfit” for an occasion, I have never truly analyzed my own clothing choices to the extent that I study clothing in my work as a costume designer. As a firm believer that clothing choices shape our lives, I decided for this project that I was most interested in studying my own clothing system and its meanings. I was most curious to understand how my clothing defines the character that I perform within different moments of my life. Through the process of understanding the meaning of my dress, I hoped to better understand my process as a designer.

Chapter 2: *Clothing and Costume*

In their definitive work, “Changing Appearances: Understanding Dress in Contemporary Society,” Sproles and Burns define clothing as “any covering for the human body” (7). In contrast, they define fashion as “the style of dress that is temporarily adopted by a discernable portion of members of a social group because that chosen style is perceived to be socially appropriate for the time and situation” (7). Similarly, I define the word “costume” as clothing that is worn when someone is performing a character other than himself or herself. Clothing is a signaling system. When garments and accessories adorn the human body, they signify to others an inner language. This language can be both intended, in the way that one plans his or her outfit for an important job interview, or unintended, in the way that an unpressed dress shirt expresses laziness to coworkers, despite the context of a busy morning on the way to work. A woman wearing a cleavage-bearing top signifies sexual interest. A well-tailored suit signifies power and status, and a sorority girl in an oversized t-shirt and Nike shorts signifies, to me, “I’m hiding my newly-attained beer belly.”

We can discover a language within one’s clothing by looking at the people around us. The formality of our dress helps us to be taken seriously and expresses our professional intentions. The revealing nature of dress expresses our sexual desires, and the closeness of our clothing expresses our comfort level with our bodies. Our clothing tells others if we want to be seen or unseen.

This thesis will explore my personal expression through clothing by analyzing the intended and unintended result of my clothing choices through my art installation titled, *White Ladies*. It examines how my personality is reflected through clothing and the way that stereotypes in our culture give us a language of interpreting dress. We consciously or

unconsciously express the person we want to be, the person that we think we are, or someone else altogether through the way we choose to dress.

Chapter 3: *Art Installation, “White Ladies”*

Much like my middle school self, I am still working to understand and define my identity through clothing. My research consisted of the creation of four characters: “The Hermitess,” “The Artist,” “The Hobbyist,” and “Real Estate Mom.” The formation of these characters is based on the concept of taking different parts of my personality, interests and tendencies, and creating four different versions of my “future self.” I then “performed” each of these characters by designing costumes consisting of clothing, jewelry, makeup, and wigs. I wore each of these costumes and was photographed performing each of the characters in her chosen habitat. I used these photographs to create an art installation, held in my home, to be viewed by students and faculty within the Department of Theatre and Dance.

“The Hermitess,” “The Artist,” “The Hobbyist,” and “Real Estate Mom” are all caricatures of me. Each character expands and exaggerates different qualities within my personality. They are all representations of my future self, both in the way I choose to represent myself in a public way and how I see myself in private. I analyzed my interests, agency, self-perception, and insecurities in order to create these characters.

I chose these four characters based on four stereotypes of Caucasian women because I am a Caucasian woman raised in middle class America. I find much in common with each: an eccentric personality, a recluse, craft lady, and a woman who enters the workforce late in life. “The Hermitess” embraces the part of me that wants to separate myself from a culture driven by comparison. “The Artist” is driven by desire to be perceived as a “professional,” and “The Hobbyist” was created by my inherent tendency to take on and subsequently abandon an excessive number of hobbies. The character of “Real Estate Mom” is driven by my suburban

upbringing and a common dynamic that happens within households that believe in the idea of traditional gender roles.

Although clothing is the primary focus of my research, it should be noted that “clothing semiotics seldom functions independently of other semiotic resources” (Owyong 192). Other factors are also relevant in a semiotic read of each of these characters including gestures, facial expressions, and each character’s physical location.

Chapter 4: *“The Artist”*

As a costume designer, I work in a predominantly female industry. Working both in the arts and in an apparel-related field, I find that many in my line of work struggle to be taken seriously. When conversing with outsiders about artistic work, one frequently receives a response that includes the phrase, “Well, that sounds fun.” Because of many common misunderstandings about my line of work, and women that work in fashion and clothing, I feel the constant need to prove myself. “The Artist” is the future me who embraces her career and, through that, the inherent female insecurity of being respected and taken seriously. She is a representation of my ambition and desire for achievement and, at the same time, my fear of public scrutiny.

More than any of my other future selves, “The Artist” is the most aware of the intentions of her dress. It is clear from her posture and pose that “The Artist” takes herself very seriously and works to be viewed in a distinct and calculated way (Page #11, #12). Within her clothing choices, she is making a deliberate statement of self-expression. “The Artist” dresses entirely in black and shades of grey. She wears a long-sleeved, black turtleneck sweater, black wide-leg palazzo pants, and a silver, structured coat. The shades of her garments express seriousness, stoicism, professionalism, and gender neutrality.

Much like the female power suit of the 1980’s, “The Artist” desires equality through her clothing choices. The color black has developed into a symbol power in western culture despite its affiliations with death and mourning, and therefore, black indicates somberness (Harvey 10). Black is perceived as suppressing expression and emotion, causing onlookers to associate it with professionalism, within the context of professional wear, and a separation from self (Rubenstein 68).

The specific choice of a black turtleneck is something to be discussed. Celebrities, artists, and business executives alike have all been photographed wearing a simple, black turtleneck. Examples of this diverse spectrum include Simon and Garfunkel, Georgia O'Keefe, Andy Warhol, Michael Kane, Marilyn Monroe, Diane Keaton, and Audrey Hepburn. One of the most infamous personalities known for the black turtleneck is Steve Jobs (Yarrow 2011). Jobs fell in love with a mock turtleneck while visiting Japanese fashion designer, Issay Miyake in Tokyo (2011). He then purchased hundreds of the garment, which became his daily uniform and his signature style for the remainder of his life (2011). I believe that more than any other garment, the black turtleneck is gender neutral. The garment implies that the body is a void. The shape of the collar draws the eyes to the face implying that it is the most important part of the person and separating clothing from the human character.

“The Artist” distracts onlookers from her physical body by covering it with fabric and jewelry. Her clothing is loose and hangs at a comfortable distance from her body, concealing the imperfections underneath and distancing the self that is seen from the self that exists beneath the layers. Many women use clothing choices to conceal parts of their bodies with which they are not comfortable (Guy & Bamin 320). Over time, “The Artist” has grown to understand the complications and needs for her specific body. She wears a long coat to distract from her wide hips, wide leg pants to distract from her heavy thighs, and long sleeves to distract from unattractive arms.

She wears layers upon layers of grey and black jewelry along with a pair of decorative reading glasses. The decorative jewelry worn by “The Artist” is directly inspired by the elderly style icon, Iris Apfel. Apfel is known for her loud and eclectic taste and for her mixing and matching of patterns and prints. Apfel is perceived as an eccentric character whose age defies

the common idea that only the young and beautiful drive fashion. Like Apfel, “The Artist’s” way of dress and adornment is a clear representation of a desire to express the woman she wants to be (Guy & Banim 316). Her clothing implies several ideas. It expresses a desire for attention, a desire to represent a self-created character, and a need to hide and disguise the body beneath the clothing. The artist is the version of me that uses clothing as a tool for self-expression and representation.



Illustration 1: Portrait of “The Artist”



Illustration 2: Portrait of “The Artist”

Chapter 5: *“The Hermitess”*

I removed myself from all forms of social media and, while many find it surprising that a member of my generation would remove herself from easy access to contact with others, I did so with the intention of distancing myself from my naturally comparative nature. Millennials can easily spend hours looking at the posts and photos of others, responding by questioning our personal success, beauty, or stage in life. Friends touting happy baby photos make us question, “Am I supposed to want a baby right now?” My choice of exiting the social media scene was my simple, yet deliberate, way of separating myself from societal expectations and it was my first step toward the hermitage.

I have always been intrigued by the idea of a hermit and wondered why a person would leave society behind for a life of solitude. Who isn’t fascinated by the idea of living life without obligations to society? I am inspired by the idea of the hermit as a “noble rebel—not so much above the law, but answering to a higher one” by making a choice to live off the grid (Willis). One of the most famous self-styled hermits, Henry David Thoreau wrote, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (143). For as long as there has been civilization, there have been hermits, and many hermits date back to biblical time (Willis). In the Christian tradition, the hermit “began with the Desert Fathers...who went out into the deserts of Egypt...as a reaction against the wealth and excess of the early church” (Willis). Many hermits seek a life off the grid as a form of escapism from societal distraction.

Given my initial attraction to a hermit lifestyle, I was curious what I had in common with the modern day hermit. I studied Christopher Knight, who is the most famous modern day

hermit, after he was finally discovered living in a campsite in rural Maine, having stolen goods from the local community for almost thirty years (2014). In Knight's interview with a GQ reporter, he commented on his time in seclusion, "With no audience, no one to perform for, I was just there. There was no need to define myself; I became irrelevant. The moon was the minute hand, the seasons the hour hand. I didn't even have a name. I never felt lonely. To put it romantically: I was completely free" (2014). After reading about Knight, I was intrigued by how a man so separate from the world of theater recognized the ideas of performance and an audience in the way that people interact with one another in daily life.

This very concept defines my interest in a life off the grid: a separation from society decreases one's need to perform. From this perspective, I created my second character, "The Hermitess." While my attraction to the hermit lifestyle is based in a real desire to distance myself from society at large, it is important to remember that theatricality and exaggeration are a part of this character. Much like the modern day trend known as "glamping" or "glam camping," "The Hermitess" is my glamorized idea of a woman living in the woods in seclusion. The creation of this character was derived from a few different sources. I was inspired by the self-titled character in Elizabeth Strout's novel, *Olive Kitteridge*, which depicts the life of a retired schoolteacher living in a small town in coastal Maine (2008). The novel tells Olive's tale through a series of short stories, showing Olive in different circumstances as she plays both the protagonist and antagonist in her own life. Both the secluded landscapes of Maine and Olive's resilient and bold nature resonated with me. Only when living in seclusion at the end of her story does Olive begin to appreciate the people in her life.

I was also inspired by the classic style found in American heritage clothing brands like L.L. Bean, Ralph Lauren, and Pendleton. These apparel companies embody a lifestyle created

thoughtfully through their branding and advertising (Chernev 1). Their clothing represents a style that exists for a person who lives a life of purpose: a person who has a need for well-constructed pants that one will not tear when they squat down to uproot a tree or a person who has to wade through snow in style. These brands exist for a person who does not follow trends, lives for adventure, and who puts their clothing on each morning, looking great with little thought. They have an intended, timeless quality, which can be seen in the L.L. Bean 100-Year Anniversary Campaign (Ramirez 2008). The ads created in this campaign depict identical scenes from early ads created by the company dating back to the 1930's (2008). They depict the L.L. Bean wearer as a timeless character and as a person who lives a life of both casual comfort and adventure. They embody the kind of person that "The Hermitess" has chosen to be.

"The Hermitess" is independent and self sustaining, living a life of seclusion to avoid making herself susceptible to the public eye. She wears tall rubber boots, and green wooly socks in preparation for rain or snow at any time. She dresses in a khaki, wool felted coat, rust colored woolen hat, beige thermal t-shirt, plaid wool skirt, and a plaid wool scarf. Each piece of her clothing exists with purpose. As she dresses each morning, putting her clothing on one piece at a time, she contemplates the daily functions of her dress, and not on how they look together. Each piece of her clothing serves it's purpose: warmth, protection, comfort, and nostalgia. While her closet once contained frivolous clothing purchases for the different functions and events, her wardrobe has whittled itself down to the last remaining garments that are needed and loved, creating a hodge-podge of her personal history. She does not wear makeup. She has an ever-increasing mustache and uni-brow, and her hair is wild and un-brushed. Her way of dress and grooming represents her separation from societal expectations as well as her chosen way of existence, living in a place of survival and nostalgia.

She dresses in warm, natural colors and is surrounded in soft, warm textures. While society shows itself in trendy silhouettes and bright contemporary colors, “The Hermitess” dresses in a way that reflects the environment. As she has distanced herself from society, she has begun to look more and more like her surroundings. She is dressed in layers as though to protect herself from both her environment and society. “The Hermitess” is a combination of many ideas represented in her way of dress: history, escapism, and idealism. Knowing these facts, “The Hermitess” is the side of me that desires to fight societal expectations and distance myself from need to conform as well as the part of me that yearns to live an idealistic existence.



Illustration 3: Portrait of “The Hermitess”



Illustration 3: Portrait of “The Hermitess”

Chapter 6: “*The Hobbyist*”

I love hobbies, but struggle to both master and maintain them. My hobbies have included scooters, rock climbing, hiking, knitting, RV’s, sewing, baking, quilting, and bicycles. My shelves are scattered with books like “Motorcycles for Dummies,” and “100 Patterns for Knitting Socks,” balls of yarn, and boxes of fabric. I once found myself researching how to grow cotton plants in my backyard in the same week that I registered for a weaving class. Eventually my hobbies die out after I have a stack of new containers labeled “Misc. Bicycle Parts,” “Fabric for Quilts,” or “Knitting Needles.” When envisioning the character of “The Hobbyist,” I created a future version of myself who has embraced her hobby loving mentality with energy, passion, and self-worth.

When researching the character of “The Hobbyist,” I looked to several resources that analyzed women who participate in cottage industry activities including the phenomenon in American culture that is known as scrapbooking. There is significant research into scrapbooking because the psychological purpose of scrapbooking is very clearly seen in the physical product that it creates. In her influential work, *Crafting Culture: Scrapbooking and the Lives of Women*, Downs observed the “scrapbooking industry (currently the fastest growing hobby and cottage industry in the United States)” and how it “utilizes ideologies of family and femininity to engage women’s participation in the hobby” (4). From studying a group of “scrapbookers” at a church event, Downs perceived that the women were performing a “mundane activity that had vast social and cultural implications” (13). She observed that all participants were white and middle-class, and that scrapbooking events, parties, and social get-togethers exist for “female bonding and socialization” (14). Meanwhile, folklore researcher, Danielle Christensen observed scrapbooking as a “maternal ‘escape’ by emphasizing the conventionally feminine and family

centered aspects of their practice” along with the “appeal to the prestige of ‘classic’ aesthetics” (2009).

I strongly relate to the observations of Downs and Christensen. Since I was a child, I have always participated in, and enjoyed, hobbies that are traditionally feminine including knitting, sewing, and needlework. I would not have pursued a career as a costume designer if I had not been exposed to crafts, fabrics, and sewing at a young age. I have observed women within my family who participate in sewing groups and book clubs experience lifetime friendships between the women within their circles. Through my research, I wanted to better understand how my hobby-loving tendencies might create this version of my future self, “The Hobbyist.”

“The Hobbyist” (Illustration #5, #6) is surrounded by her many crafts in a room that she has nicknamed “The Craft Corner.” Everything in her presence is bright, cheery and positive. She depicts a Midwestern, grandma stereotype. She is the kind of woman who offers a plate of hot cookies when anyone walks through the door. Much like Downs’ observations, “The Hobbyist” uses crafts to project her perspective of her life experience onto everything around her (13). Her clothing, in its soft, infantile color palette, expresses joy, peace, and positivity. She sees the world through rose-tinted glasses and is happy and oblivious in her craft-centered world. “The Hobbyist” finds self-worth and value in the activities that she pursues. Whether it be donating her coveted quilts to the church auction or creating stained glass ornaments as Christmas gifts, she finds meaning and friendship in her crafting.

“The Hobbyist” is photographed wearing a pair of “mom jeans,” a style of denim that became popular in the 1980’s and 1990’s. After their loss of popularity with younger generations in the early 2000’s, they have become an anti-style symbol in popular culture. They

are known for their infamous use by older generations as an unflattering, out of date means of dressing that emphasize extra weight existing around the stomach, hips, thighs, and seat. In 2003, Saturday Night Live, created a mock JCPenny commercial selling a particular brand of denim simply branded, *Mom Jeans*. In the faux advertisement, the narrator sarcastically says, “Give your mom something that says, ‘I’m not a woman anymore, I’m a mom’” implying the lack of sexuality existing in the wearer. “The Hobbyist” wears a long sleeved, floral button down shirt in shades of red and pink. Beneath her blouse she wears a cream colored turtleneck, and on top of her button down, she wears a rose colored, crocheted vest. She wears decorative, patterned socks, a floral pin, and round, wire-framed glasses. A similar style can be found in television icons like Rosanne Barr of *Rosanne*, who wears busy prints, layers, and small, decorative accessories, putting forth an expression of a positive outward perspective and a desire to create happiness within their means.

“The Hobbyist” uses her dress and the creation of objects as a form of control over her own existence. As the “scrapbooker” creates a scrapbook as a memento for her own experience, “The Hobbyist” uses her crafting to create a world in which she has decorative control. Her objects tell her daily: “Be happy.”, “Be positive.”, “You are lucky.”, “You are blessed.” “The Hobbyist” views the world as a place to be decorated which can be seen in both her surroundings and her way of dress. The walls of her home are adorned with signs reading, “It’s Never Too Late to Live Happily Ever After” while she covers her body with jewelry that reads “Faith,” “Family,” and “Love.” As she surrounds herself with projects, crafts, and scrapbooks, I surround myself with fabrics and textures in my work as a costume designer. “The Hobbyist” is the part of me that is drawn to the tangible side of costume design work along with the ever-changing life of a designer with the constant excitement of new projects and creations.



Illustration 5: Portrait of “The Hobbyist



Illustration 5: Portrait of “The Hobbyist

Chapter 7: *“Real Estate Mom”*

The “Real Estate Mom” is a woman who has spent several years putting her family first. She chose to leave a career behind and embraced child rearing after she and her husband agreed that he would be the one to climb the corporate ladder. In the process of raising three children and a husband, she has lost some of herself. The “Real Estate Mom” is on a path of self discovery.

“Real Estate Mom” is not unlike many women in American culture. A national survey of women with advanced degrees and women with highly honored undergraduate degrees reported that “almost half (43 percent) who had children had left the workforce at some point in their careers, and cited their caregiving responsibilities (for children and parents) as the number one reason behind their decision” (Stone 9). While researching the woman who returned to work late in life, I studied both late career starters and women who returned to college as adults because both have a similar purpose for their choice. According to Nancy Deutsch and Barbara Schmertz, much like women who return to the workforce late in life, “women’s experiences of schooling and reasons for pursuing higher education were often linked to gendered experiences and social structures” (478). Society expects women, over men, to leave the workforce to care for children and elderly parents.

What does a woman do living in suburbia with an outdated college degree and lack of work experience? Growing up in suburban Dallas, women like “Real Estate Mom” were common in our community and many family friends could be described as “Real Estate Moms” or “Mary Kay Ladies.” Whether it be bookkeeping, interior decorating, or hawking clothing, jewelry, and Tupperware to their friends and family, women like “Real Estate Mom” are scattered all over suburban neighborhoods. They look for ways to bring in additional income,

feel important, influential, and independent without their family as their only source of self worth. According to Pamela Stone, author of *Opting Out: Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*, “Career breaks and periods out of the workforce are costly” and women like “Real Estate Mom” sacrifice a higher salary and often enter a low entry point career such as real estate and sales (11).

“Real Estate Mom” (Page #27, #28) is photographed in two almost identical ensembles. Both outfits are bright, cheery interpretations of cheetah print. One is blue with matching turquoise jewelry while the other is pink with matching pink jewelry. Her jewelry is big, loud, and made mostly of plastic. Her dresses are tight, body conscious garments that emphasize her shape. She wears black t-strap heels and a pair of nude pantyhose. “Real Estate Mom” likely receives her fashion advice from her friends while lunching together at a chain restaurant, or discussing last night’s episode of a popular reality show.

The “Real Estate Mom” is a reflection of a showy idea of professionalism that is found in career fields like real estate and sales, while her specific clothing represents a lack of awareness to both her physical body and professionalism in her chosen industry. Her dress is a little too tight and the colors are a little too loud to be taken seriously. When she puts on her slim, knit dress, she briefly looks in the mirror thinking, “I look good for my age” and heads out the door. Her ensemble speaks to the fact that she is out of touch with her own taste and has chosen her clothing primarily from the ideas of others, following some sort of suburban women’s style handbook. It is as though her sudden re-entry into the workforce caused her to purchase two identical outfits over the course of a weekend.

Her clothing is also a strong representation of the norms of southern style. Much like her choice to leave the workforce, her style of dress is strongly gendered. In contrast to males in the

south, she is heavily accessorized, patterned, and decorated. According to Wilson, southern women have been raised to know that “men are Not Like Women,” and this notion is apparent in their clothing choices over other U.S. regions (190). Men dress in a traditionally masculine way while women dress in a traditionally feminine way. Her style fits with the regional aesthetic of the south that includes bright, vibrant colors, where a necklace comes with matching earrings and bracelet, and where Pantone’s annual color trends find their way into professional garments. School colors are extended outside of the classic Alma Mater t-shirt and onto earrings, purses, and eyeshadow colors.

“Real Estate Mom” is a representation of my southern upbringing and collegiate experience, where many women attended college in order to receive what people refer to as an “M.R.S. Degree,” or a college degree only to find a husband in the process. As I contemplate my choice to pursue a career in the arts, even that choice is strongly gendered. Within the expectations of a southern family, male family members are not permitted to pursue non-traditional career fields due to fear of the inability to provide for a family. Yet, I was given the freedom to pursue a career of my choosing. “Real Estate Mom” is the part of my character that is strongly rooted in a specific culture.



Illustration 7: Portrait of “Real Estate Mom”



Illustration 8: Portrait of “Real Estate Mom”

Chapter 8: *Conclusion*

From studying topics discussed in this project, I have grown to have a better understanding of my own artistic process and a better voice for my artistic choices. I have also gained an understanding of who I am as an artist based on psychological character choices and less on the choices that I make for aesthetics alone.

Collectively, “The Artist,” “The Hermitess,” “The Hobbyist,” and “Real Estate Mom” all influence who I am as an artist. By defining these characters, I have begun to find the ability to voice my own design philosophy, as well as my choice of a career in costume design. The unique characteristics in these characters help shape both my aesthetic choices and help me to understand why I make many of the character choices that I do in my designs. It has reinforced knowledge that I have grown to understand in my time as a graduate student. Like “The Artist,” I am a perfectionist. Like “The Hermitess,” I am an idealist. I take inspiration from many sources but use those influences to create an idealized version of a character, using color, silhouette, and fabric to perfect the body and design, sometimes straying from realism and into idealization. Like “The Hobbyist,” I have learned to embrace my love for textures and fabrics and see it as strength in my work, and like the “Real Estate Mom,” I have learned that I am an entrepreneur and have a strong drive and motivation to turn my work into a business. I have learned to trust my natural instincts and follow my natural inclinations. I have grown to have confidence in myself and my unique background and perspective.

“The Artist” is the part of me that desires success, accomplishment, notoriety, and acknowledgement from the artistic community. “The Hermitess” is the part of me that focuses on my own process and asks hard questions. “The Hobbyist” is the side of me that is drawn to the tangible side of costume design, with its fabrics, textures, and old world crafts. “Real Estate

Mom” is the part of me that is an entrepreneur and makes sacrifices to create my work. In my career as an artist, I aim to use an understanding of my unique personality traits and artistic process to succeed in the work that I do and make conscious decisions about the work that I make. Through this process, I learned how to voice my philosophy for design and how that has guided me into my career. Each day, one puts on a costume. That costume is worn to perform the theater that is life. As William Shakespeare writes in *As You Like It*,

All the world’s a stage,

And all the men and women merely players;

They have their exits and their entrances,

And one man in his time plays many parts (AYL 2.7.1-4).

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Vita

Andrea Jeannine Day was born in Dallas, Texas. Andrea was raised in Coppell, Texas and graduated from Coppell High School in 2007. Andrea attended Baylor University in Waco, Texas from 2007 through 2011. At Baylor, Andrea received a Bachelors of Science in Family and Consumer Sciences in Fashion Design. After attending Baylor, Andrea worked as a freelance costume professional working on such projects as the 2011 Superbowl XLV halftime show, the TNT television series, *Dallas*, and the A&E television series, *Longmire*. In September of 2013, Andrea entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas at Austin.

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